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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIRKUK 000141

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SUBJECT: READOUT OF RECENT PROTESTS IN KURDISTAN SULAYMANIYAH REGION

KIRKUK 00000141 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Jim Bigus, PRT Leader, POL, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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11. (C) INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: Several participants and organizers of the recent protests in the Chamchamal sub-districts of Sulaymaniyah Province said on August 17 poor services in the water, electricity, and fuel sectors had prompted growing calls for government reform in the Kurdistan region. Previous appeals for improvement of services and government reform had yielded no results and they predicted future protests would be even more violent and widespread. The recent protests were different because local police and Peshmerga were among the participants arrested by Asayish security forces. The attending representatives claimed the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Sulaymaniyah had defaulted on projects that would have resolved regional water and electricity shortages. They cited the Chamchamal-Goptapa Water Project and the Chamchamal Electricity Station as two examples and claimed tangible progress on these projects could prevent future protests. Chamachamal was being ignored they claimed because Baghdad considered it part of the KRG, while the KRG treated it as part of Kirkuk and thus under federal control.
END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

(C) ARRESTED PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED PESHMERGA AND POLICE

12. (C) Participants and organizers of recent protests in the Chamchamal sub-district of Sulaymaniyah told IPAO on August 17 that ongoing poor services in the water, electricity, and fuel sectors, as well as unemployment concerned, had led to recent violent protests in the Kurdistan region. The representatives claimed the government did not respond to peaceful demonstrations and to a previous memo demanding an improvement of services. They claimed that, of the approximately 2000 protestors, local Peshmerga and 28 police were among those arrested by Asayish security forces, which marked a new development in relations between the Kurdish public and their government. They said eight government workers also participated in the protests. (Note: The representatives presented post with a list of 17 remaining detained protestors, which included one police officer and five Peshmerga. The other detainees were listed as students and local workers. End note.)

(C) LAST ELECTIONS "NOT CLEAN"

13. (C) The attending representatives said that political corruption was another root cause of the protests. They said the last elections "were not clean" and that the party appointed technocrats who did not bother to get out into the people to understand their concerns. The attendees claimed the parties controlled all the press and this was the reason the protests were reported as against poor municipal services alone, without reference to political reform. They said contrary to press, lack of inclusiveness in government was a primary cause and that after the protests turned violent, electricity increased to 12 hours per day from the previous 3 hours the general public usually received. (Note: Post has received several reports that it is routine for KRG officials, their families, and associates to receive 24-hour electricity service, but that there has been talk recently of ending or limiting this perk. End note.) They also claimed that an order was received from the PUK government to retire anyone over 68 years of age, but that nothing had been done because no one wants to retire and because senior salaries averaged 500 USD per month compared with 100 to 150 USD per month for newly hired employees.

(C) TWO FAILED PROJECTS CITED AS KEY FACTORS

14. (C) The participants said the KRG promises to improve services had gone unfulfilled. The attendees cited the Chamchamal Electricity Station and the Chamchamal-Goptapa Water Project as two halted projects originally started by NGOs from the U.S. that were designed to alleviate water and electricity services on a large scale. The participants claimed future protests in the area could be prevented if the KRG demonstrated tangible progress on these two projects. (Note: Post has received reports that residents of Sulaymaniyah in the city itself were digging private wells due to poor water services. End note.)

KIRKUK 00000141 002.2 OF 002

(C) CHAMCHAMAL - PART OF SULAYMANIYAH OR KIRKUK?

15. (C) The representatives claimed one of the main political problems was that the central government did not control Chamchamal because Baghdad considered it part of the KRG, while the KRG ignored the area because it considered Chamchamal part of Kirkuk Province. In addition, they claimed encouraging the rule of law in Chamchamal and limiting PUK influence, where it currently dominated local government, would help the situation.

(C) BACKGROUND ON CHAMCHAMAL-GOPTAPA WATER PROJECT

16. (C) A private NGO source told IPAO on August 18 that several projects being funded by U.S. and British NGOs were halted due to excessive overhead costs, including the Chamchamal-Goptapa water project and one planned to service Halabja. At a separate meeting on the new Kurdistan "Investment Law" post learned Kurdish investors themselves were concerned that sub-contracting, and sub-sub-contracting based on connections often dried up investment monies before ground was ever broken on new projects. According to one account, the KRG took responsibility from NGOs for building the Chamchamal-Goptapa water project after it was halted. For all contractors bidding for this project, post learned, there were no design drawings, and no clarifications on power supply issues or massive standby generators. The result was that bidding varied widely and the contract was never awarded.

(U) COMMENT

19. (C) Although it appears water services are poor throughout Sulaymaniyah Province, ignoring the Chamchamal sub-district in

particular could be a deliberate attempt on the part of the KRG to force the central government to address the issue of re-attaching Chamchamal to Kirkuk Province, a long-standing Kurdish demand, and as a way of pushing the Article 140 timeline forward.

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